

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY RUTLAND (Part I)



JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, THE NEW BRUNSWICK MUSEUM

John Murray
(1720-1794)

Colonel John Murray was a wealthy businessman and politically powerful citizen of the Province of Massachusetts. During the French and Indian War he served as a Lieutenant Colonel. Murray was a resident of Rutland, Massachusetts, and the first named proprietor in the Rutland charter. From these facts tradition has held that he was responsible for the name of Rutland, Vermont, though neither he nor any of the original grantees appear ever to have settled in Rutland. Editors Note: The dark spot on the wig in the 1762 Copley portrait of Murray is a sword hole. An American Patriot pierced the portrait when raiding Tory Murray's Massachusetts home during the American Revolution.

*About the author . . . James S. Davidson received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History, summa cum laude, from St. Anselm College, Manchester, N.H. in 1953. In 1966-67 Jim was awarded a U.S. Experienced Teacher Fellowship which allowed him to take a leave from his teaching position at Mt. St. Joseph Academy in Rutland to attend a special master's program in the teaching of history at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. For the next six years Jim dug through the archival repositories of Vermont, New England and New York for the "bits and pieces" of Rutland history, seeking material for his Master's thesis **Rutland, Vermont 1770-1791**. In 1974 Jim was awarded a Master of Arts degree in History by the University of Kansas.*

Jim came to Rutland with his family in 1960. He has been active in the Rutland Historical Society since its founding in 1969. He has served as a Director, Chairman of the Board of Directors and is currently serving a third stint as President of the Society.

*About this work . . . **Rutland, Vermont, 1770-1791** was originally submitted to the Department of History and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. It considers Rutland as a community of people from its first known settlement in 1770 to 1791, when Rutland and Vermont entered the Union. It deals especially with the character and individual topics in so far as they contribute to the life of the community or exemplify some aspect of the community's life. However, the chief concern is always the character of the community.*

Although it might be expected that little of significance would happen in such a small frontier town in such a short chronological span, nevertheless it should be noted that historical change is not limited to events nor communities of great magnitude. Rather, subtle changes in the small towns of post-Revolutionary America are particularly representative of what was really happening in much of America of the time.

In Rutland the primary evidence of the early years of settlement and development unavoidably contained large gaps yet it was sufficient to establish a rather specific community character. The evidence of the period following the Revolution showed clear signs of urbanism and an attendant conservatism which signified a quiet, but nonetheless important, change in the character of the community.

Not only did these "bits and pieces" provide signs of significant change but they all began to focus on the summer of 1784 as a turning point. From this point on, new faces and new interest groups seemed to direct and control a budding urbanism and conservatism in Rutland.

*The **Rutland Historical Society Quarterly** will publish each of the four chapters in this work as a separate **Quarterly** article in the first issue of each volume year. The bicentennial of the state will be celebrated in 1991. The centennial of Rutland occurs in 1992. Publishing the early history of the community affords residents an opportunity in advance to appreciate the upcoming celebration. It also can create a desire to participate in the preparations.*

I. Early Settlement and Its Problems (1770-1775)

By James S. Davidson

By the mid-eighteenth century many inhabitants of Connecticut and Massachusetts had felt the effects of population pressures developed by a century of growth. The French and Indian wars to the north and an alien New York to the west, however, prevented the natural venting of these pressures into unsettled areas. But by 1760 the dangers from the French and Indian wars were nearly dispelled and a stream of migration northward into Vermont began. Paradoxically, these same wars, which had prevented immediate settlement, provided many soldiers an opportunity to observe in person the beautiful and fertile river valleys of Vermont. For many other people back in southern and western New England, these observers were a source of equally, if not overly, attractive tales of opportunity.¹

The appeal of Vermont land was further increased by a series of generous land grants by Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire. Between 1749 and 1764 Governor Wentworth granted one hundred and thirty-one townships, each about six miles square, west of the Connecticut River in what was later to be called Vermont. One hundred and fourteen of these grants were made between 1761 and 1764, mostly to citizens of New Hampshire and Massachusetts but a few to citizens of New York. Although many of the grants quickly, if not originally, came into the hands of speculators, prices that ranged from less than a third of a shilling to slightly more than a shilling an acre by 1770, were still very reasonable. Land speculation may have delayed actual settlement in some cases, but it did not prevent it. Between 1760 and 1775 more than ninety settlements were begun in what was to be Vermont.²

Not all obstacles to settlement in Vermont had been overcome, however. In 1764 the British government established the Connecticut River as the boundary between New York and New Hampshire, thus making the New Hampshire grants of Governor Wentworth of dubious value.

After the promulgation of this decision in America in 1765, the provincial government of New York began granting lands in Vermont. Conflicting New Hampshire and New York land grants opened a great opportunity for the land speculator and in turn made the title of the land owner extremely uncertain.

Controversy immediately arose, especially in western Vermont. Most of Vermont's early settlers held New Hampshire titles, perhaps for no other reason than that the New Hampshire fees were usually much less than those of New York.³ On the other hand the settlers, with few exceptions, were accustomed to the New England way of life and the same reluctance that previously kept them from settling on New York lands to the west still undoubtedly prevailed, although the settlers might have been more amenable to New York jurisdiction if New York had been more eager to validate their New Hampshire titles.⁴

In spite of the drawbacks created by the land title controversy, Vermont land had numerous overriding natural advantages. Numerous streams not only provided transportation and mill sites but the occasional flooding of the alluvial flats along the margins of the streams provided extremely fertile farmland.⁵

In addition to the abundance of cheap and fertile land, one of Vermont's attractions was its proximity to settled regions to the south. Thus it was possible for a settler to visit the potential settlement, build a shelter, even plant a crop, and return home to Massachusetts or Connecticut for the winter. Only later would he return with his family to establish a permanent home. Even after permanent settlement, contacts with the "community of origin" were still maintained by many Vermonters. Thus the early expansion into Vermont required a great leap into the wilderness.⁶

Expansion into Vermont followed two natural highways north. On the one hand the people from east of the Connecticut River generally went up the Connecticut River Valley and settled east of the Green Mountains. On the other hand the people who lived west of the Connecticut River went through the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts and up the valley between the Taconic Mountains on the west and the Green Mountains on the east into the Champlain Valley lowlands. Only along the Crown Point Military Road in mid-Vermont did these two northward streams of settlement find opportunity to mix and that, for the most part, after the Revolution.⁷

These two streams of settlement in Vermont differed not only in origin but also in manner of settlement. Eastern Vermont generally experienced a transplantation of groups of people from one or two communities in Connecticut or Massachusetts. In western Vermont the pattern could best be described as a series of "stepping stones." Settlers would move in steps, the length of which varied from the distance to the next town to perhaps one hundred miles toward the frontier. There they would establish for a while and then some would move on again.⁸

This pattern in western Vermont was undoubtedly influenced by the uncertainties of the New Hampshire land titles in the face of challenge by the New York authorities. However, there was some precedent from the settlement pattern in western Massachusetts, where many people were only one generation or less removed from Connecticut. The same settlement pattern had also occurred in western Connecticut. The communities of western Vermont thus tended to be composed of mixed "communities of origin" but with a definite Connecticut background.⁹

Rutland was in the western stream of the migration north into Vermont. The first settler of Rutland, according to tradition, was Colonel James Mead, whose migration was an excellent example of the "stepping stone" pattern. Colonel Mead was born on the Connecticut-New York border at the extreme southwestern corner of Connecticut. His family migrated about fifty miles north to Nine Partners, a Connecticut settlement in Dutchess County, New York, which was only a few miles from the Connecticut border.

In 1764 Colonel Mead moved to Manchester, Vermont, about one hundred miles north of Nine Partners. He lived there for five years before visiting Rutland, thirty-five miles north, in the fall of 1769. In Rutland he purchased twenty rights of land, ten of which he immediately sold, and prepared a shelter before returning to Manchester. In March, 1770, he moved his family to Rutland.¹⁰

The migrating patterns of the other early settlers of Rutland included many of the "stepping stone" variety and some who came directly from Connecticut. The "communities of origin" of the immigration into Rutland formed a line running north from Nine Partners, New York, through Salisbury, Connecticut; Lanesboro and Williamstown, Massachusetts; Bennington and Manchester, Vermont, to Rutland.



Governor Benning Wentworth was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on July 24, 1696. He became the first governor of the Province of New Hampshire in 1741 when it was made a distinct province. As governor he was authorized by the Crown to grant rights to unoccupied lands of the Crown in America. In 1749 Wentworth began granting lands west of the Connecticut River in what is now Vermont. On September 7, 1761, he made the grant of the Township of Rutland to a group of persons that included John Murray of Rutland, Massachusetts. Wentworth resigned as governor in 1767. He died at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on October 14, 1770.



Other settlers seemed to move into this pattern from Gaybrook and New Haven, in southern Connecticut, Waterbury and Woodbury, in central Connecticut, and Wallingford and Simsbury, a little further north in Connecticut. Most of these "communities of origin" were west of the Connecticut River and thirty to forty miles from one another.

Although the Rutland settlement had a relatively broad "community of origin" base in southern Vermont, western Massachusetts and western Connecticut, with few exceptions, most of the early families of pre-Revolutionary Rutland could be traced to western Connecticut origins, and thus demonstrated a strong Connecticut cultural influence.¹¹

Early settlers in Rutland must have been attracted by its natural advantages. An amphitheater of mountains virtually surrounded the township. From these mountains numerous streams fed into Otter Creek, which flowed north through the township and the Champlain Valley lowlands to Lake Champlain. These waterways created a number of intervalles of rich soil, dotted with numerous mill sites.

It was on one of these rich intervalles, reputed to have been an ancient beaver meadow, that Colonel Mead had located in 1770. Not far distant, about a mile below the juncture of East Creek and Otter Creek, he built a mill at the "Little Falls" on Otter Creek. Good pine lots stood less than two miles away.¹²

Thomas Rowley, who surveyed much of early Rutland, summarized many of his favorable impressions of Rutland's attributes in a pre-Revolutionary poem, entitled "To Rutland Go." In the poem he publicized Rutland's soil, air, streams and pine timber and included a special invitation to poor New York tenant farmers to come and settle under the New Hampshire Grants, free from the aristocratic domination of New York. He concluded with an admonition not to fear the designs of New York land jobbers who controlled the New York titles. These could be successfully opposed.¹³

The pre-Revolutionary settlement of Rutland was dominated by this opposition to the land claims of New York titleholders. In 1771 New York had made a grant of land called Socialborough. This included the lands of Rutland and Pittsford, to the north, which had been granted previously by Governor Wentworth under the New Hampshire grants. Although there were many settlers in Clarendon to the south, who held New York titles, nearly all of Rutland's early inhabitants had settled under New Hampshire grants.¹⁴

Perhaps inspired by Rowley's admonitions, Rutland's settlers, though not the young radicals of frontier folklore, were ready to make a vigorous defense of their land against all encroachments by the emissaries of New York. One of the unfortunate representatives of those New York interests was William Cockburn. He had been hired by New York claimants to survey the Rutland lands granted under the New York charter name of Socialborough. In the summer of 1771 Cockburn had established a north-south line from the northern boundary of Clarendon and was more than halfway through the town of Rutland [part of Socialborough] when James Mead and Asa Johnson, another early Rutland settler, "urged" him to depart and not return.¹⁵

The Rutland resistance to the New York encroachments was so determined that Benjamin Spencer, a supporter of New York interests in Clarendon, warned James

Duane, New York land speculator and principal proprietor of Socialborough, of the dangers posed by attempting to survey in a number of Vermont towns especially from "those people in Socialborough [Rutland and Pittsford]." ¹⁶

In late 1773 John Smith, who owned three rights of Rutland land, and Sylvanus Brown, one of the younger settlers of Rutland, led similar opposition to the activities of New York authorities. Royal Governor William Tryon of New York retaliated by offering a fifty pound reward for their apprehension.

On another occasion Sylvanus Brown and William Post, another early Rutland proprietor, were charged with ejecting Yorkers. Later, with Michael [Micah?] Whitney, also a Rutland proprietor, they were accused of taking possession of a New York claimant's farm. ¹⁷

As late as January, 1775, there was active opposition to New York authority in the New Hampshire Grants. Benjamin Hough, a justice of the peace under the New York government, was apprehended by a group of men including Sylvanus Brown, James Mead and Samuel Campbell. They were all Rutland men. Hough was taken forty or fifty miles south to Sunderland, Vermont, where he was imprisoned for four days. He was then tried and found guilty of attempting to support and participate in the New York government in the New Hampshire Grants by a court of seven judges. The judges included Ethan Allen and Rutland's James Mead. ¹⁸

Although Rutland successfully resisted the New York encroachments, the uncertainties of the situation hardly led to rapid growth. Nor were these uncertainties to be removed with the advent of the American Revolution and an additional threat from the north. ¹⁹

BACK NOTES

¹Lois Kimball Matthews, *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlement and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865* (New York, 1962), pp. 99-102, 108-111; Walter Hill Crockett, *Vermont: The Green Mountain State*, I (New York, 1921), 157-171, 260; Genieve Lamson, "Geographic Influences in Early History of Vermont," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society for the Years 1921, 1922 and 1923* (Montpelier, Vt., 1924), pp. 79, 104, 106. For some of the reasons that New Englanders considered New York alien see Lamson, pp. 91-92. For a New York expression of the differences between New England governments and New York government, see Crockett, I, 281-282.

²Crockett, I, 167-8, 176-188; Mathews, pp. 111-112; Lamson, p. 90. Evidence of the reasonable price of land in 1770 can be found in the Rutland Town Records MS (hereafter cited as TR) (City Clerk's Office, Rutland, Vermont), Book I, 34, 170. For example, Nathan Stone sold to James Mead twenty rights [approximately 7,000 acres] for £100 (September 30, 1769) and Samuel Smith sold to his son John Smith, 1,080 acres for £64 (December 4, 1770). These examples held true in other Vermont towns. For examples, see Crockett, I, 213, 250.

³Crockett, I, 189-191, 271; Roy Hidemichi Akagi, *The Town Proprietors of the New England Colonies: A Study of Their Development, Organization, Activities and Controversies, 1620-1770* (Philadelphia, 1924), pp. 124, 185. Akagi notes that most settlers refused to pay these settlement fees and no effort was made to collect them.

⁴Crockett, I, 289-290, 317-318.

⁵Zadock Thompson, *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil, and Statistical, In Three Parts* (Burlington, Vt., 1842) Pt. I, 6-7; Lamson, p. 106.

⁶Crockett, I, 210, 216, 232; Lamson, pp. 80, 105; Mathews, p. 115.

⁷Harold A. Neeks, "An Isochronic Map of Vermont Settlement," *Vermont History*, XXXVIII:2 (Spring, 1970), 95-102. Apparently, all the Rutland settlers before the Revolution

moved south to north up the western route. None of the pre-Revolutionary inhabitants seemed to be from the east. The earliest recorded use of the Crown Point Military Road by a Rutland immigrant is the account of the movement of the McConnell family to Rutland in 1779. (See Chapter Four.)

⁸Lamson, pp. 80, 103.

⁹Crockett, I, 259-261; Lamson, pp. 101-103; Mathews, pp. 115-117. Evidence of a preponderance of Connecticut influence in early Vermont can be found in Vermont's first independent name - New Connecticut.

¹⁰H. P. Smith and W. S. Rann, ed., *History of Rutland County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y. 1886), pp. 307-308; Crockett, I, 236; Mathews, p. 95.

¹¹Based on the author's unpublished study of "communities of origin" of a number of pre-Revolutionary Rutland settlers. The genealogical notes of Mrs. Alton Swan were an invaluable source for this study. Numerous early land records also indicated the source community of the purchaser of land.

¹²Smith and Rann, pp. 303, 308, 319; David C. Gale, Proctor, *The Story of a Marble Town* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1922), p. 23; Lamson, pp. 110-113. Lamson notes that the part played by numerous streams in influencing settlement of a town can hardly be overestimated.

¹³Thomas Rowley, ["To Rutland Go,"] *The Rural Magazine: or Vermont Respository*, I: 7(July, 1795), 383-385. Rowley's poem was composed, and undoubtedly published, over twenty years before its appearance in *The Rural Magazine*. It can be conveniently found in Abby Maria Hemenway, ed., *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer: A Magazine embracing a history of each town, civil, ecclesiastical, biographical and military, III, Orleans and Rutland Counties*, (Claremont, N.H., 1877), 1093-1094. Also published in the *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 2, 1979.

¹⁴Smith and Rann, pp. 310-315; Crockett, I, 193-194.

¹⁵Gale, p. 28; Crockett, I, 338; Smith and Rann, pp. 312-313, 315. The average age of early Rutland heads of family was nearly forty years. Mathews also found that many who led settlement in western New York later in the century were "in the meridian of life." See Mathews, p. 166. Rutland heads of family who moved to western New York in the next decade also supported this pattern.

¹⁶Crockett, I, 362-363; A[biel] M[oore] Caverly, M.D., *History of the Town of Pittsford, Vermont. . . with Biographical Sketches and Family Records* (Rutland, Vt., 1872), pp. 84-85.

¹⁷Crockett, I, 365; Caverly, p. 89; John P. Sargent, Attorney General of the United States, Address, *Vermont State Sesqui-Centennial Celebration, Montpelier, Vermont, January 5, 1927* [n.p.n.d.] pp. 33-34; Rutland Proprietors' Records MS (hereafter cited as TR) (City Clerk's Office, Rutland, Vermont), p. 77.

¹⁸Crockett, I, 371-372; Sargent, pp. 35-40; Matt Bushnell Jones, *Vermont in the Making, 1750-1777* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), 334-335. Affidavits regarding this event can be found in A[mund] B[Miley] O'Callaghan, ed., *Documentary History of New York*, IV (Albany, N.Y., 1851) 538-543.

¹⁹Some effort to establish a separate colony for the New Hampshire Grants was made in 1774-1775. If the Revolution had not intervened, perhaps this would have provided a very practical solution to the controversy with New York. The Revolution did check the ferocity of the controversy with New York and, although it flared up occasionally, it never reached its pre-Revolutionary intensity. See Crockett, I, 376-377.

CREDITS

Maps of Socialborough and New Hampshire, *Academy Books, Rutland, Vermont*; John Murray, New Brunswick Museum, New Brunswick, Canada; Benning Wentworth, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.

An 18th Century Rutland (Vermont) Map Portfolio

The accompanying map portfolio is composed of two maps which show the approximate locations of the earliest land grants by the proprietors of the original town of Rutland and the locations of the homes of the earliest settlers.

The Socialborough Map. On September 7, 1761, Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire made the original grant for the township of Rutland. In 1764 the British government ruled that the territory that is now Vermont properly came under the jurisdiction of New York. On February 12, 1767, a group of New York men made application for a New York grant of land to be known as Socialborough. But in July, 1767, an Order of the King in Council prevented any further grants of land by New York in Vermont until the British government could review conflicting claims. In October, 1769, the Governor and Council of New York interpreted the order of the King as prohibiting only the granting of such lands as had actually been granted by New Hampshire. Although a Royal Instruction in 1770 forbid the granting of any land within the New Hampshire Grants, Socialborough was granted on April 3, 1777.

As Deputy Surveyor of lands and a Socialborough proprietor, William Cockburn had made an original survey of Socialborough in 1767. In 1771 he established a north-south line (magnetic) and began to lot out the land of Socialborough, which overlapped the New Hampshire grants of Rutland and Pittsford. But Cockburn did not finish his lotting survey for the Socialborough proprietors because James Mead and Asa Johnson stopped him and told him in no uncertain terms to desist. They had obtained their land under New Hampshire titles and were not about to give them up or pay additional fees.

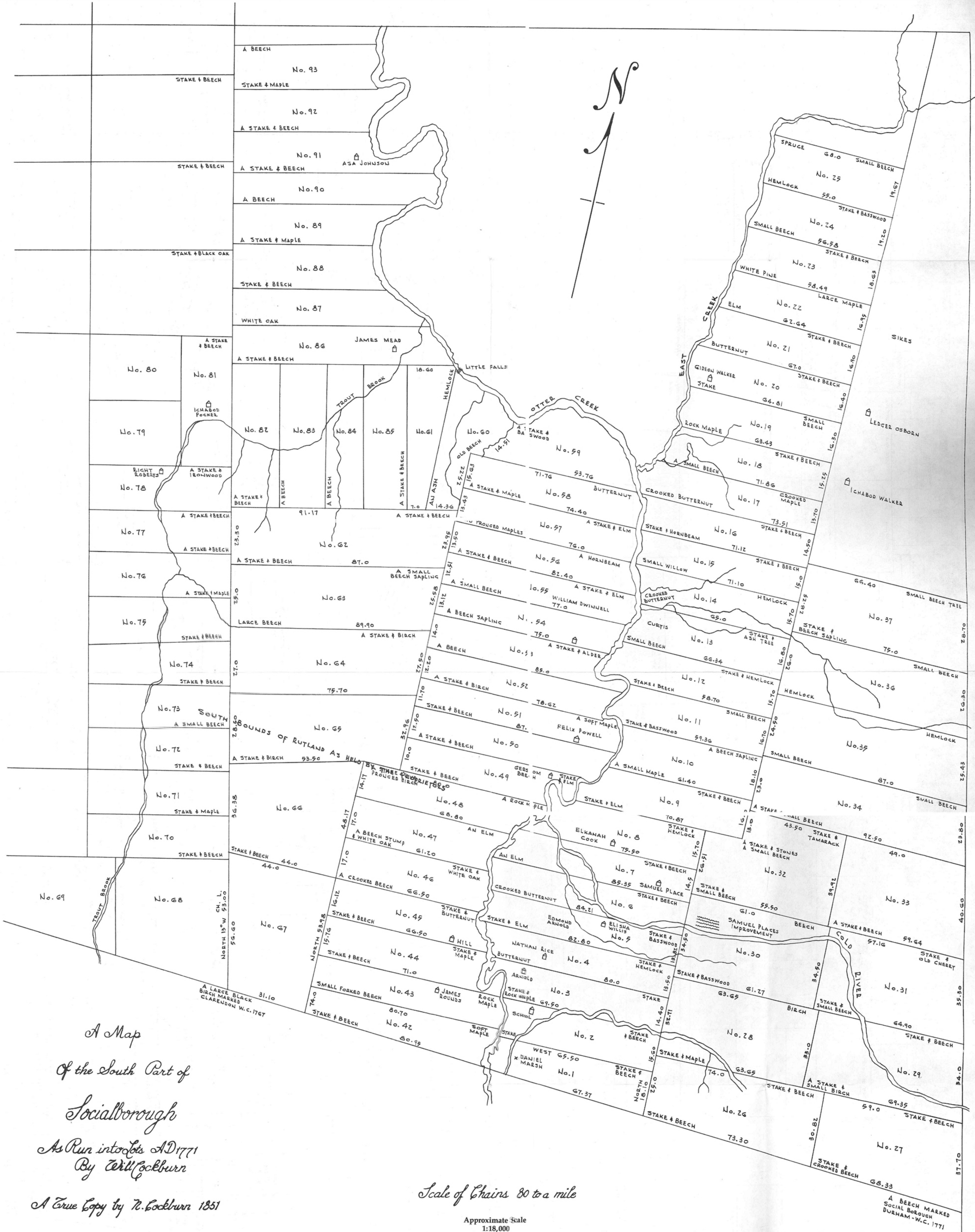
Although Cockburn's map is incomplete and of no legal value, it does identify many of the homes and improvements of settlers who were in Rutland in 1771, one year after its settlement. It also indicates the location of rivers and creeks in the area. The south portion of the map includes a portion of Clarendon. The south boundary of Rutland is indicated by the words "south bounds of Rutland as held by the proprietors."

The Rutland Map. In 1790 Vermont settled its land dispute over the validity of the New Hampshire grants with New York and in 1791 entered the Union as the 14th state. The Rutland proprietors, in attempting to accomplish a final distribution of lands in the old town of Rutland, found the records conflicting and incomplete. A reconstruction of the original divisions of land was authorized and a town plan was completed in 1790. Distribution of the proprietors' land was completed in 1792. A town plan was apparently drawn in 1794 as the town treasurer's books shows Town Order #43 for the payment of 12 shillings to John Cook for making a plan of Rutland for the Surveyor General of Vermont in October, 1794. This map is probably a more modern copy of the 1794 reconstruction of the original division lines of Rutland as drawn under the proprietors' New Hampshire grant.

The original layout of the town consisted of a group of 20 rights which were lotted out in the southwestern quarter of the town. A second group of 15 rights were lotted out to the east of the 20 rights. This group ran north from the south boundary of the town. A third group of 5 rights were lotted out to the north of the 15 rights. Rivers or creeks were not located on the Rutland map but numerous unclosed boundary lines suggest their location.

The names on the various division of lands are not the names of the settlers but of the holders of the original charter rights, none of whom apparently ever settled in Rutland. Occasional names in brackets are those of settlers.

It would appear that there were three divisions of land by the proprietors in Rutland. A first division apparently consisted of 200 acres, a second division of 100 acres and a third division of 50 acres, thereby totalling about 350 acres in each right plus an allowance for roads. However, the town plan suggests that there were many exceptions to this method of division.



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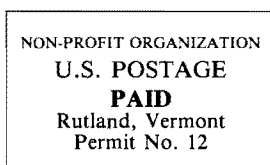
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